



# Sociological and Psychological Traits of Human Bonding to Reflected in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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**Abstract**— *Man is a social animal and depends on others to fulfil his needs. Hence it becomes imperative that he maintains a proper relationship with others. It is indeed true that relationships cannot be created overnight. For building a relationship, one should have qualities like kindness, adaptability, understanding, tolerance, patience, and the like. Maintaining the relationship that is built is yet another challenging task. Since literature is a reflection of human life, many literary works focus on human bonding and the need and importance of maintaining a relationship through the portrayal of various characters. Purple Hibiscus is one such novel written by the African American writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, considered one of the 100 'Most Influential People.' The novel brings out various aspects of human bonding and relationship through the incidents that occur in day-to-day lives. The present paper intends to analyse the struggles faced by the characters involved in different kinds of relationship and their realising the need of connectedness in the novel, Purple Hibiscus.*



**Keywords**— *Portrayal, Human, Patience, Dependence, Relationship*

“One finger cannot lift up a thing” says an African proverb. Faye Z. Belgrave and Kevin W. Allison, in African American Psychology: From Africa to America observe, “All humans have a need to belong, to affiliate, and to be in relationships with others. Friendships and meaningful relationships are essential. . . . We form relationships to have fun, to share intimacies, and to get our goals met” (129). Paul Bloom, a Canadian American psychologist says, “Humans are social beings, and we are happier, and better, when connected to others.” “Human bonding is as old as humanity itself” since man would have felt the need to be connected right from the time of his creation. Relationships are the building blocks of human life, and by maintaining proper human relationship, man can lead a purposeful life.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines relationship as follows: “the way in which two people, groups, or countries behave toward each other or deal with

each other.” It is indeed true that relationships cannot be built overnight. For building relationships, one needs certain qualities like kindness, commitment, adaptability, patience, tolerance and the like. After creating relationship maintaining that becomes a challenging task. Since literature is a reflection of human life, many literary works depict many aspects of human life through various characters and the relationships and bonds they have with each other. *Crazy Rich Asians*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Fault in our Stars*, *Sons and Lovers* are a few examples in which the theme of relationship is dealt. The novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, written by the African American writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is yet another novel dealing with the importance of connectedness and relationships. The novel brings out the various aspects of relationship including its intricacies and complexities which are very similar to the happenings in the day-to-day life of people. The present paper intends to analyse the problems

faced by the characters as they are involved in different kinds of relationships in the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*.

African American writings have become a large corpus of literature. These were produced by the writers of African descent who lived in the United States. Afro-American literature, which started as oral literature like all other literatures, emerged in the written form in the late eighteenth century with the writings of Phillis Wheatley. Autobiographical and spiritual narratives dominated the African American literary scene before the advent of the Slave Narratives. The arena of African American literature became popular with the Slave Narratives of the nineteenth century. Moreover, with its impact, the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was considered the flowering period of literature and arts. Many writers have contributed their share to the development of this literature.

It should be noted that African American writers have been honoured with the highest literary awards and prizes. For instance, The Nobel Prize for literature was given to Toni Morrison in 1993. Racism, Afro-American culture, the role of Afro-Americans in the large American continent, slavery, exclusion, hybridity, struggle for equality, and the clash between tradition and modernity are some of the significant themes of the Afro-American writings. These writings have incorporated many forms of oral literature, including spirituals, gospel music, sermons, rap, and blues. Many critics say that African writings are rich in poetry.

The civil war changed both the position and the theme of Afro-American people and their writings, respectively. Before the American civil war, people were considered slaves. Hence, their writings focused on various aspects of slavery, such as voice against slavery, struggle to escape from slavery, and liberation from slavery. After the American civil war, racial discrimination became an important subject because the Afro-Americans were not treated as equals by the Americans; the white Americans ill-treated them. Hence, the Afro-American writings of the twenty-first century dwelt on racial discrimination. Some non-fiction writings by W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington debated on whether to accept or confront the racist attitudes of the people of America. Today, Afro-American writings have become an integral part of world literature with Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *Colour Purple*. Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are some of the renowned African American writers.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who divides her time between Nigeria and the United States of America, is considered one of the 100 'Most Influential People.' She

was born as the fifth child of six children to the senior academics James Nwoye Adichie, a retired professor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor the University of Nsukka, and Grace Ifeoma, the first female registrar of the same University. Their family was a traditional catholic family in South-Eastern Nigeria, and it lost its wealth during the Nigerian Civil War. Adichie was a voracious reader and started to read one of the most powerful writers from Nigeria, Chinua Achebe, even at the age of ten. She was not only inspired but also influenced by his writings.

Adichie received many prizes in the University School of Nsukka. She was forced by her father to study medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria, where she started writing, and her writing skill made her quit her medical degree. She moved to Drexel University in Philadelphia, the United States of America, on a scholarship to study Communication and Political Science. There she published her first collection of poems entitled *Decisions* in 1977 and *For Love of Biafra*, a short drama in 1978. She made several contributions to literary journals during her college times. She completed a degree in Creative Writing from John Hopkins University and received a master's degree in African Studies from the Ales University. She has been recognized as the young Anglophone writer whose works attract readers of all generations towards African literature.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is known through her novels, short stories, and non-fiction works. Her works are translated into many languages. Her novels include *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013); *The Thing Around Your Neck* published in 2009, is her notable short story collection; "We Should All Be Feminists" is a book-length essay which was published in 2014. Her book, entitled *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, was published in March 2017. Her recent work *Notes on Grief* brings out the deep grief she felt on her father's death, James Nwoye Adichie. Adichie got many awards, honours, and accolades for her works. She received wide critical acclaim with the publication of her first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, in 2003, which marked her as a prominent writer. It was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004. Adichie was also awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in 2005.

The novel *Purple Hibiscus* starts with a quotation from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as observed by Kambili: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papaflung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere" (3). It is a story set in post-colonial Nigeria,

which deals with the political turmoil, economic instabilities, and religious conflicts.

The novel centres around the character of Kambili Achike, tracing her growth from her childhood days up to her fifteenth year. Like Adichie's family, Kambili's family is also catholic. Born in a wealthy family, she is dominated by her devout Catholic father, Eugene. Eugene is portrayed as a religious fanatic and violent figure in the Achike family. He often subjects his wife, Beatrice, and his two children, Jaja and Kambili, to violent beatings. It should be noted that his wife suffers from miscarriages twice due to his physical violence. The story is told from Kambili's point of view. It details how Kambili suffers at the hands of an arrogant father who is a strict disciplinarian. The ambiance of a disintegrated family combined with the tyrannical rule of her father Eugene makes it difficult for Kambili to progress in life.

Both Kambili and Jaja are sent one day to aunt Ifeoma, their father's sister's home. Aunt Ifeoma, a professor in a university, lives with her three children. Aunt Ifeoma's house is entirely different from Kambili's house. The Aunt follows a more liberal catholic way of life, and the children are given freedom and are allowed to raise their voices and express their opinions. Things look so different because they are raised very strictly by their father, Eugene, a rigid Catholic. The friendly ambiance in aunt Ifeoma's house helps Kambili and Jaja to become more open and bold enough to form their opinions. Only here do they come to understand what and how parental love could help in the moulding of the children. They also realize the value of freedom and human bonding. "We're social animals because we need other people to survive," said Prof. Vivian Zayas, psychology. While at Aunt Ifeoma's house, Kambili falls in love with a young priest called, Father Amadi, which marks the transition of Kambili from her childhood to adolescence.

The importance of human connectedness, maintaining relationships and the complexities involved in relationships can be analysed in this novel. Eugene's relationship with his children has two different ways. On the one hand, he punishes his children severely, even for their minor mistakes. For instance, he pours boiling water on Kambili's feet for coming second in the class instead of first. Similarly, he flogs both Kambili and Jaja heavily for having spent five more minutes with their grandfather than the time allotted by him. He is angry with them because his father is a practitioner of Igbo tradition, unlike him. As he is a staunch Catholic, he cannot tolerate the traditions and customs followed by traditional Igbo. On the other hand, he cuddles his children with his love sips while drinking tea every day, and emotionally breaks down when

his children leave for their aunt's house to stay there for a week.

The relationship of Kambili and her brother, Jaja, with their father is also not smooth and well-maintained. The children are always at their father's beck and call. Therefore, they hide their likes and dislikes from their father, which creates a gap between the father and children. The children wish for a more liberal environment, though they are provided with the best of everything. Jaja goes one step further and questions his father about his faith. He asks: "Of course God does. Look at what He did to his faithful servant Job, even to His own Son. But have you ever wondered why? Why did He have to murder his own son so we would be saved? Why didn't he just go ahead and save us?" (289). Therefore, it is evident that the relationship between father and children is not smooth in the Achike family and the children yearn for his love.

Kambili, the narrator of this novel, appreciates Aunt Ifeoma for her positive approach on all occasions. Aunt Ifeoma becomes a mentor for Kambili and her brother Jaja who their theistic father often punishes without valid reasons. The children who frequently watch their father behave cunningly and cruelly notice the big difference in Aunt Ifeoma's house. Moreover, the atmosphere in the house of Aunt Ifeoma becomes an eye-opener to Kambili and Jaja. The entire ambiance with the positive energy of Aunt Ifeoma makes Kambili say, "Laughter always rang out in Aunt Ifeoma's house" (140).

The novel takes a different turning point when Beatrice, Eugene's wife, poisons him, unable to tolerate his violence towards her children and herself. Jaja takes the blame of killing his father and goes to prison. Aunt Ifeoma and her children move to America because of the unfair treatment meted out to her by the university authorities, who dismissed her from her position as a lecturer. Beatrice's mental health deteriorates due to the guilt of poisoning her own husband. Kambili takes charge of the entire house by looking after her mother and visiting her brother in prison every week. The novel ends with an optimistic note of Jaja's release from prison.

The relationship between the characters of Eugene's wife Beatrice with Eugene also requires analysis. At the beginning of the novel, Beatrice remains an obedient and submissive wife. Her voice is lower than a whisper. She has never raised her voice against anyone in her family, including her children and the maid. She takes care of her husband and children with the utmost care and affection. But Eugene torments her with physical beatings, resulting in her miscarriage twice. This could be

understood from Aunt Ifeoma's words when Beatrice comes to her house after a miscarriage. "This cannot go on, nwunye m,' Aunty Ifeoma said: "When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (213). This advice of Aunt Ifeoma makes Beatrice ponder the happenings in her house. She feels that she has been subservient for too long a period, and she has to act now. After a few days, she poisons her husband. This indicates Beatrice's transformation, though not a welcome change, from a submissive wife into a bold murderer. One wonders if there was real love lasting between them. The relationship between husband and wife could have been better if Beatrice had expressed her true feelings then and there explicitly.

Like Beatrice's, Kambili's silence is also a big hurdle in building her relationship with others. The relationship between Kambili and Amaka is not palatable because Amaka considers Kambili a snob. The following conversation between Kambili and Amaka brings out this clearly.

"I thought the Igwe was supposed to stay at his place and receive guests. I didn't know he visits people's homes,' Amaka said, as we went downstairs. 'I guess that's because your father is a Big Man.' I wished she had said 'Uncle Eugene' instead of 'your father.' She did not even look at me as she spoke. I felt, looking at her, that I was helplessly watching precious flaxen sand slip away between my fingers." (93)

Later, Amaka realizes that Kambili is shy and finds it difficult to converse with others. This realization helps both of them to understand each other and develop a friendship.

Aunt Ifeoma becomes irritated by the act of Eugene punishing his innocent daughter in the name of religion; she strongly raises her voice against her brother's cruelty. The kind-hearted lady tries to clarify that religion should make a man honest, caring, and maintain his relationship. Nevertheless, by developing these qualities, one cannot become truly religious as religion should symbolize humanity and not cruelty. She condemns him as thinking of himself as god. On witnessing the wounds in Kambili's body, Aunt Ifeoma feels sorry for her and stands against her brother. She has also insisted that Kambili keeps her distance from her father.

The ambiance created by Aunt Ifeoma is a magnificent setting that cannot easily be given through money or anything else. It can be given only by an independent soul. Kambili and Jaja feel as if they are free from prison when they come away from their house to Aunt Ifeoma's. Their house is remarkable for the daily

routines of education and strict religious rituals. Aunt Ifeoma helps Kambili get discharged from the hospital; she brings her home when her father badly beats her. As Meher points out, "The environment in Aunt Ifeoma's house gives them relief from the fearful climate of their own home. The house in Nsukka gives them a sense of serenity and love which is absent in their home. Ifeoma is the agent in the novel who gives Jaja and Kambili strong protection from their tyrant father and good guidance on religion, on good and bad" (208).

Happiness does not depend on the material wealth or the varieties of food and nutritious drink or the space in the house; it comes out of freedom which is not available in the house of Kambili and Jaja. Aunt Ifeoma makes them breathe the fragrance of freedom which the rich Papa fails to give them. She takes care of her sister-in-law Beatrice Achikewhen she has lost her baby because of her brother's arrogant and cruel treatment and strongly condemns her for blindly supporting him.

Kambili feels proud of Aunt Ifeoma and declares happily, "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental hibiscus: rare, fragrant with undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one crowds waving green leaves chanted at government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do"(16).

The emotional bond between Aunt Ifeoma and her children Amaka, Obiora, and Chima is firm. She wears bright red lipstick and trousers as a sign of freedom. She showers love and gives warmth and care to her children. Unlike her brother, she never discriminates between her children while assigning domestic duties; nevertheless, she teaches them to shoulder all household responsibilities. Through her, the children come to know the meaning of dignity, self-respect, and freedom. Kambili admires her aunt's way of rearing her children by saying, "... but my cousins simply seemed to speak and speak and speak" (120). At the same time, the freedom is granted with certain controls. She never hesitates or delays.

Ifeoma's struggle is not to overcome poverty, as it is a key to open the door of freedom. The success of Aunt Ifeoma lies in the way she has taught her children to accept it with a strong mind so that they can be moulded and refined properly. Nevertheless, she never shirks her responsibilities. Finally, she succeeds in raising them in the right way. She never hesitates to teach discipline to her children. She corrects them whenever the need arises.

Ifeoma takes care of her sick father, whereas her rich brother neglects his responsibility of taking care of his father in the name of religion. When her purse becomes empty because she does not get her salary, she makes great



efforts to pay for the tests done in the private lab. “The lab staff was on strike, too, Papa-Nnukwu could not have the tests done. Aunty Ifeoma stared at the middle distance and said she would have to find a private lab in town and, in a lower voice, said the private labs jacked up their fees so much that a simple typhoid fever test cost more than the medicine for the fever. . . worry lines etched in her forehead” (155).

Ogechukwu A. Ikedigwu states:

Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene’s younger sister, is in sharp contrast with her brother: she is accommodating, realistic and reasonable, and she believes in democracy even in running her own family. Because of this, her children are socialites and freely air their views on issues concerning them. Though she is a Catholic, she does not discriminate against her father, Papa Nnukwu, because he is not a Christian. She takes good care of him and provides his needs to the best of her capability. (12)

When Aunt Ifeoma’s brother tries to spend money to give a catholic funeral to his father, she bursts out; she rejects her brother's money because that could be used only for a catholic funeral. She emphasizes that their father is an Igbo and not a Christian. She makes it clear that it would be against their culture, tradition, and the belief of her dead father. Though she has no money with her, she rejects her brother's offer of money and becomes enraged. In her fury, she says, “I will put my dead husband's grave up for sale, Eugene, before I give our father a catholic funeral. Do you hear me? I said I will sell Ifediora’s grave first! Was our father a Catholic? I ask you, Eugene, was he a Catholic? *Uchugbagi!* ” (189)

It is indeed true that love may come into one's life at any time, irrespective of caste, culture, religion, and age. Kambili falls in love with Father Amadi, a young priest. Father Amadi plays a crucial role in cheering Kambili and helps her to build confidence. This relationship is also complex. It is because, though father Amadi likes Kambili, he is unable to reveal it to her because of his commitment to God. At the same time, the relationship between father Amadi and Kambili continues even after the father's transfer to Switzerland. They exchange letters often sharing their concern, problems, and solutions mutually. When Kambili takes the responsibility of the Achike family, father Amadi provides her moral support with his timely suggestions and consolation, although from a distant land. Therefore, this relationship is more positive and supportive.

The paper tried to analyse the need for relationships and connections between characters. The

paper advocates that relationships are the pillars of support, and human connection is inevitable. It is mandatory to keep them positive and healthy.

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